

PLEADING FOR PRAYER

NO. 1887

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 21, 1886,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me; that I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judaea; and that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints; that I may come unto you with joy by the will of God, and may with you be refreshed. Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.”
Romans 15:30-33.

THE apostle of the Gentiles held a very useful and glorious office, but he had by no means a smooth path in life. When we read the account of his sufferings, and persecutions, and labors, we wonder how a single individual could have gone through them all. He was a true hero, though a Hebrew of the Hebrews, he stands in the very front of the whole Gentile church as its founder and teacher under God, and we owe to him what we can never fully estimate. When we consider the struggles of his life, we do not wonder that the apostle was sometimes in great sorrow of heart, and heavily burdened in spirit. He was so at the time when he wrote this Epistle to the Christian friends at Rome.

It was a great delight to him to have to go to Jerusalem—it was a place which was much revered and loved by him, it was a greater privilege for him to go and exchange salutations with his brother apostles, and it was the most joyous privilege of all to be the bearer of a contribution from the Gentiles to relieve the necessities of the saints at Jerusalem. He rejoiced much more in that gift to Jewish believers than if it had been anything for himself. But he was well aware that there were those in Judea who hated him with deadly hatred, and would seek his life. He had been the rising hope of the Jewish party, and he had become a Christian, therefore the bigoted Jews regarded him as an apostate from the faith of their fathers.

They had, moreover, special venom against him, since he was bolder than any other Christian teacher in going among the Gentiles, and shaking off altogether the bonds of the ceremonial law, he also came out more clearly than any other man upon the doctrines of grace, and salvation by the cross of Christ, and this provoked the fiercest hostility. Paul had also the apprehension that he would not be well received even by the brethren at Jerusalem. He knew what a strong conservative feeling there was among the circumcision for the maintenance of the old Jewish law, and how he was a marked man because he had shaken off entirely that yolk of bondage. Thus he had fears as to foes, and doubts about friends. His case was peculiarly hard.

What did Paul do when his spirit was greatly oppressed? He wrote to his brethren to pray for him. He asked the good friends at Rome that they would lift up their hearts earnestly and unitedly to God, that he might be preserved from the double evil which threatened him. In the last chapter of this epistle we have the names of a great many of those private individuals at Rome to whom the apostle appealed. We do not know any of them, except it is the Priscilla and Aquila, of whom we have heard elsewhere, but this great man, this inspired apostle of God, who was not a whit behind the very chief of Christ’s servants, makes his appeal to these unknown and humble individuals, that they would strive together with him in their prayers.

I delight in this, it shows the lowly spirit of the apostle Paul, and it reveals to us his high value for the prayers of obscure men and women. He feels that he needs what the prayers of these people can

bring to him, he is sure that without those prayers he will be in danger of failure, but that with them he will be strong for his great enterprise. He sees what prayer can do, and he would arouse it into powerful action.

Does it astonish you that a man so rich in grace as Paul should be asking prayers of these unknown saints? It need not astonish you, for it is the rule with the truly great to think most highly of others. In proportion as a man grows in grace he feels his dependence upon God, and in a certain sense, his dependence upon God's people. He decreases in his own esteem, and his brethren increase in his estimation. A flourishing tradesman, a man who has a large business, is the man who needs others, he prospers by setting others to labor on his behalf, the larger his trade, the more he is dependent upon those around him.

The apostle was, so to speak, a great master trader for the Lord Jesus, he did a great business for his Lord, and he felt that he could not carry it on unless he had the co-operation of many helpers. He did not so much want what employers harshly call "hands" to work for him, but he did need hearts to plead for him, and he therefore sent all the way to Rome to seek such assistance. He wrote to those whom he had never seen, and begged their prayers, as if he pleaded for his life. The great apostle entreats Tryphena and Tryphosa, and Mary and Julia, to pray for him. His great enterprise needs their supplications.

In a great battle the general's name is mentioned, but what could he have done without the common soldiers? Wellington will always be associated with Waterloo, but, after all, it was a soldiers' battle. What could the commander have done if those in the ranks had failed him? The commander-in-chief might very well have touched his hat to the least subaltern or to the humblest private, and have said, "I thank you, comrade. Without you we could not have conquered." The chief troubles of the great day of Waterloo arose from certain very doubtful allies, who wavered in the hour of battle—those were the general's weakness, but his hope and strength lay in those regiments which were as an iron wall against the enemy. Even thus the faithful are our joy and crown, but the unstable are our sorrow and weakness.

Every ministering servant of the Lord Jesus Christ is in much the same condition as Paul. True, we are of a lower grade, and our work is on a smaller scale, but our needs are just as great. We have not all the grace which Paul possessed, but for that very reason we make the more pathetic an appeal to you, our friends and fellow helpers, while we use the apostle's language, and cry, "We beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with us in your prayers to God for us."

I shall call your attention to this text with the longing in my own heart that I may more abundantly myself live in your prayers. I have to rejoice in the prayers of thousands of holy men and women who love me in the Lord. I am deeply grateful for the affectionate supplications of multitudes that I have not seen in the flesh, to whom the printed sermons go week by week. I am a debtor, not only to the beloved people around me, but to a larger company all over the world. These are my comfort, my riches, my strength. To such I speak at this time.

Beloved, I need your prayers more than ever. I am more and more conscious of their value, do not restrain them. Just now there is to me a special need of grace on many accounts, and I hope that some of those who have long borne me up will give me a special portion of aid at this hour. I am not worthy to use the same language as the apostle Paul, but I know no better, and my necessity is even greater than his, therefore I borrow his words, and say, "I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me."

In our text there are two things, *prayer asked*, and *a blessing given*—"Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen."

I. First, here is PRAYER ASKED FOR.

We will look at the apostle's request for prayer in general, and then afterwards we will look to the details which are mentioned in the thirty-first verse.

First, here is *a request to the people of God for prayer in general*. He asks it *for himself*—"That ye strive together with me in your prayers to God *for me*." He knew his own weakness, he knew the

difficulty of the work to which he had been called, he knew that if he failed in his enterprise it would be a sad failure, injurious through coming ages to the entire church. He cried, “*Agonize for me*,” because he felt that much depended upon him. It is like a man who is willing to lead the forlorn hope, but he says to his comrades, “You will support me.” It is like one who is willing to go into a far country, bearing his life in his hands, but he plaintively exclaims, “You won’t forget me, will you? Though you stay at home, will you think of me!”

It reminds us of Carey, who says, when he goes to India, “I will go down into the pit, but brother Fuller and the rest of you must hold the rope.” Can we refuse the request? Would it not be treachery? It is not according to the heart of true yoke-fellows, it is not according to the instincts of our common humanity, that we should desert any man whom we set in the front of the battle. If we choose a man to be our representative in the service of our God, we must not desert him.

A man cannot be charged with egotism if he begs for personal support when he is engaged in labors for others, and is not seeking himself but the success of the great cause. Under heavy responsibilities he does well to enlist the sympathies and prayers of those whom he is serving, and he has a right to have them. Beloved friends, if you are with me in the great battle for God and truth, and if you count me worthy to bear the brunt of this war, I beseech you for Christ’s sake, support me by your persistent wrestling at the throne of grace. Pray for all ministers and workers, but pray also for me. I am of all men the most miserable if you deny me this.

Observe in what relationship he regards them when he puts the request. “Now,” he says, “I beseech you, *brethren*.” “I beseech you.” It is the strongest word of entreaty he can find. It is as if he said, “I go down on my knees to you, and implore you. I ask it of you as the greatest favor you can do me. I ask it of you as the dearest token of your love, that you strive together with me in your prayers to God for me.” He does not call them companions, or fellow workers, or friends, but he addresses them as brothers. “You are my brethren,” he says, “I feel a love to you, you Romans, converted to God. I have a longing in my heart to see you, and though I have not so much as spoken with you face to face, yet we are brothers. The life that is in you beats also in my heart, we are born again of the same Father, we are quickened by the same Spirit, we are redeemed by the same Savior, therefore, spiritually, we are brethren. Shall not brothers pray for one another?”

He seems to say, “If you are brethren, show this token of your brotherhood. You cannot go up with me to Jerusalem, and share my danger, but you can be with me in spirit, and by your prayers surround me with divine protection. I do not ask you to come, you Romans, with your swords and shields, and make a bodyguard about me, but I do beg of you, my true brothers, if you be so indeed, to agonize together with me in your prayers to God for me.”

If there remains in the Christian church any brotherhood whatsoever, every leader of the host, every preacher of the gospel, every pastor of a church, should receive the proof of that brotherhood in the shape of daily intercession. Every sent servant of God beseeches his brethren that they strive together with him in prayer to God for him, and I am not a whit behind any of them in the urgency of my request to the many who have hitherto proved themselves my brethren. I know your love has not grown cold to me, I have abundant evidence of that. O my brothers, act as brothers to me now, and beseech the Lord to bless me.

But observe what kind of prayer he asks for, “That ye strive together”—that you “*agonize*”—that is the word. You have before you in this expression a reminder of that great agony in Gethsemane, and I should think the apostle had that picture before his eyes. In the garden our Lord not only prayed as was His habit, but with strong crying and tears He made His appeal to God. “Being in an agony He prayed more earnestly.” He wrestled till He “sweat as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground,” but none agonized together with Him. That was one of the deepest shades of the picture, that He must tread the winepress alone, and of the people there must none be with Him. Yet did our Lord seem to ask for sympathy and help—

*“Backward and forward thrice He ran,
As if He sought some help from man;”*

but He found none even to watch with Him one hour, much less to agonize with Him. The apostle felt that an agony alone was too bitter for him, and he therefore piteously cries, “I beseech you, brethren, that you agonize with me in prayer to God for me.” Now, as the disciples ought to have sympathized with the Savior, and entered into His direful grief, but did not, even so it may happen to us. But, brethren, I trust that the unfaithfulness to the Master will not be repeated upon His servants.

It remains to all that are true brethren in Christ that, when they see a man in agony of heart for Christ’s sake and for souls’ sake, they should bow the knee side by side with him, and be true brothers to him. When his labors become intense, when his difficulties are multiplied, when his heart begins to sink, and his strength is failing him, then the man must wrestle with his God, then his brethren must wrestle at his side.

When the uplifted hands of Moses are known to bring a blessing, Aaron and Hur must stay them up when they are seen to grow weary. When Jacob is struggling at Jabbok, and we see him there, we must turn in and help him to detain the angel of the covenant. If one man can hold Him fast by saying, “I will not let you go unless you bless me,” surely a score of you can make a cordon round about him, and speedily win the blessing. What may not a hundred do? Let us try the power of agonizing prayer!

Do we know as yet what it means? Let us rise as one man and cry, “O angel, whose hands are full of benedictions, we will not let You go, except You give us Your own blessing, the blessing of Your covenant.” If two of you are agreed as touching anything concerning the kingdom, you shall be heard, but what if hundreds and thousands of the faithful are of one mind and one mouth in this matter? Will you not at once cry unto God, “Bless You Your servants, establish the work of our hands upon us, yea, the work of our hands establish You it”?

You see it is earnest prayer which Paul asks for, not the prayer which foams itself away in words, but prayer with force, with energy, with humble boldness, with intensity of desire, with awful earnestness, prayer which, like a deep, hidden torrent, cuts a channel even through a rock. His request was, “that you wrestle with me in your prayers to God for me,” and this is our request this day.

He does not, however, wish for a single moment to exclude himself from the prayer, for he says, “that you agonize *with me*.” He is to be the first agonizer. This should be the position of every minister. We ought to be examples of wrestling prayer. How I wish that you could realize more fully the work allotted to the apostles when they said that it was not reason that they should leave the word of God to serve tables! There was a difference about the distribution of the alms money among the widows, and the twelve declared that they could not attend to such a matter, for, they said, “We will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” This would be heaven to me. But notice that at least half, and the first half, of their work lay in prayer.

Oh, if that could be our portion! If we could but have full space for prayer and meditation, and were set free from the petty secularities and differences incident to church life. Oh that we could have more to do with Him from whose right hand the supreme blessing comes—that were a joy indeed! But even if the apostle could thus himself agonize, he did not feel satisfied, for he beseeches others to wrestle with him in prayer to God. He sought communion in supplication.

Even thus would I beseech you, brethren, to come with me into the inner chamber. Come with me into the holy of holies, let us together approach the mercy seat. Lend me the help of all the spiritual force you have, that we may together agonize in prayer to God that the blessing may descend upon the enterprises now in my hands. You see the sort of prayer which is needed, even the effectual fervent prayer of righteous men, and may the Holy Spirit brace up our spirits, that we may be able to join in such agonizing in this time of need.

This verse is one of the most intense I ever remember to have read, even in so intense a book as this Holy Scripture. Observe the fervency of the pleading—“Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus

Christ's sake." What an argument! That name is full of power with true hearts. You owe Him everything, you owe Him your souls, you owe Him every hope for the future, every comfort in the present, and every happy memory of the past. Your life would have been worse than death apart from Him. His love to you constrains you, because you thus judge, that when one died for all, all died, and that you so died that henceforth you should not live unto yourselves but unto Him.

Now, says he, as you cannot repay the Lord Jesus Christ personally, repay it to His servant by your prayers, join him in his agony in recollection of that greater agony in which none could join, by which you were redeemed from death and hell. If there be any love to Christ in a Christian's heart he must pray that the Holy Spirit would bless the ministry of the word. Surely your hearts must be turned to stone if you do not plead for a blessing upon that ministry by which you yourselves have been brought to Christ. If I have been a spiritual father to any of you, you will not fail to pray for me. Will you? As you love that Savior whom I preach, I beseech you, for the sake of Jesus Christ that you strive together with me in your prayers to God for me.

But he adds to that another argument—"for the love of the Spirit." If the Spirit of God has indeed loved you and proved it by quickening and sanctifying you, then pray for His ministers. If the Spirit of God has created a love in you, which is stronger than mere natural affection—a love which does not arise out of any fleshly relationship, or any mere association, or any casual partiality, but a love which the Holy Spirit Himself creates and fosters in your heart—then pray for me. If there be such love in you, not natural and temporary, but spiritual and therefore everlasting, then pray for the Lord's servant. If there be in you a love which may exist, nay will exist, in heaven itself, if there be such a love in you, then says the apostle, I beseech you, pray for me.

Brethren, I say the same. Unless our profession is a lie we love each other, and we must therefore show that love by our prayers for one another. Especially if any of you have been brought to the Lord Jesus Christ by the ministry of any man whom God favors with His help, then that man must live forever in your hearts, and be remembered in your prayers. You cannot escape from the obligation of intercession for the man who brought you to Jesus. As long as you live, and as long as he remains faithful, you must bear him on your heart in supplication. It must be so, the love of the Spirit has knit us to one another, and none can put us asunder. Ours is no feigned unity, but deep, and true, and real.

In Christ Jesus, my brother, there has been begotten in our hearts an affection for one another which death itself shall not destroy. We will not be separated. Then, by the love of the Spirit, I beseech you that you agonize together with me in your prayers to God for me. Every word pleads with tears, there is not a wasted letter in the whole verse.

Why do you think the apostle at that special time asked these brethren to pray for him so? Was it not because he believed in the providence of God? He was going up to Jerusalem, and the Jews would seek to slay him. They hunted him in every place, and now he was going into the lion's den, but he believed that God in Providence could overrule all things, so that he should not suffer injury at the hands of blood-thirsty zealots, but should be delivered out of their malicious power. We also believe in God that works all things, therefore, let us pray that all opposition to His Gospel may be overcome.

He believed also in the influence that God can have upon men's hearts, especially upon the hearts of His own people. He was afraid that the Jewish believers would be very cold to him, and therefore he prays God that His Holy Spirit may warm their hearts, and make them full of love, so that the offerings he took to them from the Grecian churches might be accepted, and might foster a sense of hearty fellowship in the hearts of the Hebrew saints towards their Gentile brethren.

Do you not also believe that the hearts of all men are in the hands of the Lord? Do you not believe in the supremacy of the will of God over the free will of man? Do you not rejoice that there is not only a Providence that shapes our ends, but a secret influence which molds men's hearts? Therefore it is that we urge you to plead with God that we also may have acceptance with His people. We desire to render them much service, and to enjoy their loving regard. It is painful to us to differ with any, and joyous to be in communion with all parts of the church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What is more than this, the apostle believed in the power of the prayers of simple people so to move the mind of God that He would exert His hand in providence and His influence over the hearts of men. Never let us imagine that the doctrine of the fixity of events, or the supremacy of law, as the philosophers call it, is at all contrary to the truth that prayer is effectual for its own ends and purposes.

In olden times a warrior was going forth to battle for his country, and a certain preacher of the word said to him, "My prayer is made continually for you that you may be victorious." The warrior, in his philosophic doubt, replied that he saw no use in the promised prayers, for if God had determined to give him victory, he would have it without prayer, and if fate had decreed that he should be defeated, prayers could not prevent it. To which the godly man very properly replied, "Then take off your helmet and your coat of mail, and hang up your sword and buckler. Go not forth to battle at all with your men-at-arms, for, indeed, if the Lord is to conquer your enemies He can do it without your weapons, and if He will not prosper you, it is in vain for you to mount your war horse."

The argument, when carried out, answers itself, there is, in truth, no force in it. The net result of such reasoning would be absolute inaction. Common sense shows us how absurd it is. All means are to be used, notwithstanding the eternal purpose of God, for that purpose includes means and their uses. We declare that among the most potent means in all the world is prayer and this must not be neglected. There are certain ascertained forces, and among those forces, always to be reckoned with and relied upon is the force of the cry of God's dear children to their great Father in heaven, in other words, the power of prayer. In prayer we present the sacrifice of God's own Son to God's own self, and prevail by its means.

O brothers and sisters, we ask your prayers without doubt or question. We know and are persuaded that they will avail much. By your power in prayer God's power will be set in motion, and by that force all will be accomplished which shall be for His glory and for our good.

I hope you have been so far interested, may God grant you may have been influenced by these remarks, and excited to incessant intercession!

In our text there is, in the next place, *a statement of the apostle's desires in detail*. When we pray, we should make a point of praying for something distinctly. There is a general kind of praying, which fails from want of precision. It is as if a regiment of soldiers should all fire off their guns anyhow, possibly somebody would be killed, but the majority of the enemy would be missed. I believe that at the battle of Waterloo, there were no arms of precision, they had only the old Brown Bess, and though the battle was won, it has been said that it took as much lead to kill a man as the weight of the man's body. This is a figure of the comparative failure of indistinct, generalizing prayer. If you pray anyhow, if it be with sincerity, a measure of blessing results from it, but it will take a great deal of such praying to accomplish much. But if you plead for certain mercies definitely and distinctly, with firm unstaggering faith, you shall richly succeed.

Our apostle gives his friends three things to pray for, first, he would have them ask that he might be delivered from them that did not believe in Judea. He was delivered, not perhaps in the precise manner which he hoped for, but he was to the letter delivered from the unbelieving Jews. Certain zealots bound themselves with an oath that they would not eat till they had slain him, but they went a long while hungry, for the arm of the Roman Empire was stretched forth to protect Paul against his infuriated countrymen. Strange it was that Caesar's power must be as a shield around the feeble servant of the mighty God! From raging mobs and secret confederacies Paul was saved, apparently, by Roman soldiers, but secretly by Roman saints. Against all oppositions from without let us pray.

They were also to ask of the Lord that his service which he had for Jerusalem might be accepted of the saints. This also was granted, the brethren did accept Paul's embassy. He met with little difficulty, the contribution was accepted with much gratitude, and we do not hear afterwards of those bickering between the Jewish and the Gentile believers. Much was done in the apostolic college at Jerusalem to create a heartier feeling towards the Gentile brethren, and the kingdom of Christ was henceforth owned to be over all races and kindred of men. Paul did accomplished very much, and had comfort in his

mission to the mother church. Oh that we also could be of service to that community of Christians to which we belong! Brethren, pray that our word may be accepted by our own brethren, for some of these are wandering from the way of truth.

They were to pray next, that he might come unto them with joy by the will of God, and might, with them, be refreshed. That was to be the third prayer. It is to be observed that this petition was also heard, but it was not answered as Paul might have expected or desired. He did come to them according to the will of God rather than by his own will. He may or may not have been on his way to Spain, as he purposed, he certainly was on his way to prison, as he had not purposed.

His first prayer, that he might be delivered from them that believe not in Judea, was not answered in the way of his never being in danger from them, or coming into difficulties through them, but he was delivered out of their hands by becoming a prisoner to the Roman governor, and being sent under his guardianship to Caesar, to whom he had appealed. By that means he traveled to Rome at the expense of the Imperial Government, and on landing at Puteoli, close to Naples, he found friends waiting for him, and as soon as the Roman brethren heard of his landing, they dispatched a company to meet him at Appii-Forum, a place on the road to Rome, where they stopped to change horses, and to take refreshments. There he saw his prayer beginning to be answered.

Further on, at a place called the Three Taverns, more dear friends from Rome met him, “whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage.” The Roman saints had long looked for the apostle, and he came at last—an ambassador in bonds, a prisoner who must go to the Praetorian guardroom, and there await the emperor’s will and pleasure. They had not expected to see him in such case, but they were not ashamed of his chains. They made a considerable journey to meet him, and he was filled with their company, and refreshed by their fellowship, as he had desired. Even his imprisonment may have been a rest for him; it could not have involved such wear and tear as his former labors and persecutions.

We read the other day that Holloway Jail is a choice place for rest and enjoyment to a man with a clear conscience, and I dare say that Paul found his confinement at Rome to be rather a refreshment than otherwise after his years of weariness and buffetings. There he was shut away from his furious persecutors, certainly, no Jew could take his life there. He was not afraid of being stoned while in imperial custody, and probably he was the most at ease because he had not to preach to such as the Corinthians and the Galatians, from whom he had asked no prayers, but had received much grief. He asked the Ephesians and Philippians, the Colossians and the Romans, to pray for him, but from the others he would have received little benefit, for they were very weak in the faith, and troubled with sad disorders.

He was in his imprisonment clear of those fickle and quarrelsome folk who had often pained him. His confinement under guard would not permit his preaching himself to death, or wearing himself out with watchings, the soldier who kept him would make him reasonable, and so, I have no doubt, by the will of God he received precisely what he had asked his friends to pray for, “that I may come unto you with joy by the will of God, and may with you be refreshed.”

It would not have been Paul’s will to have come to Rome with a chains on his wrists, binding him to a soldier, but he did so come, for this was the will of God, and was the surest way to his being refreshed. Paul refreshed the Romans and they refreshed him, and thus he had a happy sojourn in Rome. God was with him, and he had the privilege of testifying of Christ before the Roman emperor, and making Jesus to be known even in Caesar’s household.

Thus, brethren, the Lord heard the prayer of His servants. He will also hear our prayers, not in my way, not in your way, but in the way which Paul has indicated, namely, “by the will of God.” Therefore pray for a blessing, and leave the way of its coming to the good Lord who knows all things. Rest you sure that it will come by the will of God, and then it will be according to our will if we are in full accord with the Lord, as we ought to be. See the efficacy of prayer, then, in Paul’s case; though the desire did not seem to be accomplished, yet it was so.

When the Lord does not appear to hear His people's prayers He is hearing them none the less, yes, rather He is answering them all the more fully and graciously. When the Lord replies by terrible things in righteousness rather than by sweet, smooth deeds of kindness, He is doubly blessing us. Do not vessels often sail more swiftly with a side wind than they would do with a directly fair wind? The sails are more under the action of a side wind than if it blew directly behind them. The Lord often gives His people side gales, and these turn out to be the best they can have. Let us trust the divine wisdom, and rest assured that the Lord will do better things for us than we can ask or even think.

II. I have but little time left to notice THE BLESSING GIVEN, indeed it occupies but one verse in the text, and that verse is the shortest of the four, and therefore I may give it due consideration in a brief space. See how Paul, with all his anxiety to gain the prayers of his friends, cannot finish the chapter without uttering a benediction upon them. "*Now the God of peace.*"

What a blessed name! In the Old Testament Scriptures He is the "Lord of Hosts," but that is never the style in the New Testament. The "Lord of Hosts" is God as He was revealed under the old dispensation, in the majesty of His power, "the Lord is a man of war, the Lord is His name." But now that our Lord Jesus Christ has further unveiled the Father, we see Him as "the God of peace." Is not this a greater, sweeter, and more cheering title? O God of peace, we long for Your presence with us all!

What does Paul wish for them? "The God of peace *be with you,*" not only "peace be with you," but, better far—"The God of peace," and so the source and fountain of peace. He wishes them, not the drops, but the fountain itself, not the light only, but the sun. He would have God Himself to be with us as "the God of peace." He would have the Lord to fill us with an inward peace, so that we may never be disturbed in our minds. He would have the Lord shed abroad His own peace in our hearts, so that we may always feel at peace with God, no cloud coming between our souls and our heavenly Father, no ground of quarrel arising between us and the great King.

When "the God of peace" makes peace with Himself, and so keeps our minds at peace within, He also creates peace with one another, so that we bear one another's burdens, and those who are strong are willing to bear the infirmities of the weak. "The God of peace be with you."

Our apostle says, "The God of peace be with *you all*"—not with some of you, with Priscilla and Aquila, but with Mary, and Amplias, and Apelles, and Tryphena and Tryphosa, and with "the beloved Persis which labored much in the Lord," and with "Rufus chosen in the Lord, and his mother," and "Philologus, and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints which are with them." The benediction is, "The God of peace be with *you all.*"

Unless all are at peace, none can be perfectly quiet. One brother who is quarrelsome can keep a whole church in trouble. One fellow knocking about the boat may stop the oarsmen, rend the sails, and run the boat on a rock. I should not like one stray shot from a rifle to be traveling near my windows, for even if all the other shots which are in the armory should lie quiet, that one flying danger might be the end of me. Oh that the peace of God may be with *all* the saints in *all* the churches! It is a blessed benediction. Such a benediction we pronounce with all our heart this morning—"Now the God of peace be with *you all.* Amen."

Do you not think that Paul implies that this will be the *result* of their prayer? If you will but strive together with me in your prayers, then the God of peace will be with you. May we not view it as the *reward* of such prayer? You have prayed for the Lord's servant, and now God will bless you with an abundance of peace. Or did he hint that this is a necessary *condition* and *cause* of true prayer? When they were all at peace among themselves, happy in their own minds and full of communion with God, then they would begin to pray for God's servants. Put it first or last, may this peace come to you, and may there be hearty pleading prayer to God that His blessing may rest upon the church, and upon the testimony of His servants.

Now we draw to a close, brethren. Prayer is sought most earnestly by me at this moment. I speak, I think, in the name of all those who have to stand prominent as preachers of the Gospel of Christ. We beseech you, our beloved friends and fellow laborers that you wrestle together with us with God on our

behalf that our testimony may be with power and with success, for the times are very difficult. The very air is full of unbelief. The solid earth seems well-nigh to tremble with unrest, social and political—a deep and terrible unrest that fills us with dark forebodings of the future. The hope of the world lies, under God, in the church of Jesus Christ. Therefore we beseech you, brethren, if in other days and softer times you did in a measure restrain prayer, do so no longer, but wrestle for us with God.

What is coming no man knows. We wish not to play the Cassandra, prophesying evil things continually, but who is there, though he be a prophet bright-eyed as Isaiah, who can give you a good forecast? Are not all the signs of the times big with terror? Therefore to your tents, O Israel, and in your tents cry to God that a blessing may come upon this nation and the world.

Men are perishing all around us. Whatever may have been the state of the world in Paul's day—and it was, no doubt, horrible to the last degree—it is not much better now, and the population of the world has so largely increased since those days that all her problems have become more difficult. We are much better aware of the miseries of vast populations than people could have been in apostolic times. Paul knew but little of the world except that portion of it which bordered on the Mediterranean Sea, the whole world then seemed to lie in a nutshell, but now our discoverers and geographers, our steam boats and telegraphs, have brought a greater world close to our doors.

We share with the sorrows of India, we groan in the darkness of Africa, the cries of China are at our doors, and Egypt's griefs are our own. If a population anywhere is starving or suffering oppression our newspapers declare the evil to all readers, and general feeling is awakened. Our sympathies for humanity are called forth much more than in former times, and so far, this is good, but then it heaps heavier burdens upon the thoughtful, and increases the terrible responsibility of those who are able to lend a helping hand. Increase of knowledge demands increase of prayer. "The world for Jesus" is our motto, but how the world for Jesus if the church of Jesus does not wrestle in her prayers?

Dear brethren, do remember that the truth alone, if not enforced by the Spirit of God, will not sink into the hearts of men. They say, "Truth is mighty, and will prevail," but this is only half the case. If you put truth upon a shelf, and let the dust lie on her record, of what use will it be to men? Truth unknown, how can it enlighten? Truth not felt, how can it renew? There must therefore be the preacher to call attention to the truth, but how shall they preach except they be sent? and how shall they be sent aright except in the power of the Holy Ghost? and how can we expect the Holy Ghost if we do not ask for His working? Wherefore, we pray you, wrestle together with us in your prayers that the Holy Ghost may go forth with the truth and by the truth.

This will be to your profit. No man hears his pastor preach without deriving some benefit from him, if he has earnestly prayed for him. The best hearers, who get the most out of a man, are those who love him best, and pray most for him. God can make us dry wells to you if you offer no prayers for us. He can make us clouds that are full of rain, if you have pleaded with God on our behalf.

But the master argument with which we close is that which Paul mentions—"For Christ's sake." Oh, for God's sake, for His name and glory's sake, if you would honor the Father, if you would let Jesus see of the travail of His soul, wrestle together with us in your prayers for the divine working. It is so, brother, you know it is so, we are wholly dependent upon the Spirit of God.

If it be so, that without God's blessing we can do nothing, and that God's blessing is given if we inquire of God for it, then I need not press you further—you will pray for me and for other preachers of the word. If your hearts are right, you will each one resolve to offer special, continuous, and fervent prayer in private, and in your families and in our holy convocations, and these shall deepen into an agony before God, and then a blessing shall be given us which we shall scarcely have room enough to receive. Lord, teach us to pray!

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ROMANS 15

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—202, 993, 992

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